

Testimony of

Kate Dias

Connecticut Education Association

Before the

Appropriations Committee

Re:

HB 5037 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023

SDE and TRB Agency Budgets

February 17, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kate Dias, and I serve as the president of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts across the state.

I testify today in support of Governor Lamont's mid-term budget adjustments affecting the Department of Education and the Teachers Retirement Board. We support Governor Lamont's proposed increases for the state's Open Choice program and state-supported magnet schools in the Sheff region and across the state.

For the state's retired teachers, Governor Lamont keeps the state's commitment to fund the annual teachers' retirement system contribution, increase funding toward the unfunded liability, and cost-effectively maintain the solvency of the retiree health insurance fund. We applaud Governor Lamont for his continued commitment to keeping pension systems sound.

For the educators and students in our classrooms, the budget is a good first step toward improving the conditions for teaching and learning. However, more needs to be done in order to revitalize our schools and address teacher shortages and attrition exacerbated by the pandemic. We ask committee members to consider CEA's attached proposal for investing in the recruitment and retention of educators in our public schools and revitalizing the conditions for teaching and learning (please see CEA's Legislative Priorities summary at the end of this testimony).

More specifically, the proposed budget maintains the Education Cost Sharing phase-in to full funding, providing predictability to funding levels. The ECS budget is reduced by \$6.2 million because of declining student enrollments and changes in student socioeconomics. This, combined with additional savings in the Department of Education programs, should be reallocated toward the critical need in our schools to attract and retain educators. Such investments could include incentives (for example, loan forgiveness) and a state ad campaign to attract a diversity of young adults to the teaching profession. Funding should

also be used to help school districts hire needed social workers, counselors, speech pathologists, special education teachers, and para-educators.

In addition, we urge committee members to consider funding supplemental retention incentives for educators to address increasing attrition driven by the pandemic, unaddressed mental health needs of students, and increasing baseless attacks on teachers for doing their job. We also ask for additional funding to the State Department of Education to streamline the evaluation, support, and professional development system for educators.

Additionally, Governor Lamont's budget adjustments provide added support for schools in agency budgets such as the departments of Social Services (DSS) and Administrative Services (DAS) that will be heard by this committee at a later date. We see them intrinsically linked to the success of our schools, so I mention them here as well.

In the governor's proposed DSS budget, we support the expansion of funding to provide children's mental health services in schools and elsewhere. There has been a burgeoning mental health crisis among children in our schools, including the earliest grades, that pre-dated the pandemic and has only worsened since. Addressing this crisis will require investments in support staff and additional resources beyond what the governor has proposed. We urge committee members to consider funding additional supports we recommend in our "Building Successful Schools" proposal (included in CEA's Legislative Priorities summary at the end of this testimony).

Governor Lamont's budget adjustments affecting DAS also recognize the importance of addressing indoor air quality in schools and the outdated and often inadequate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems (HVAC). Poor HVAC in schools has resulted in increasing workers' compensation claims, lost school days due to closures, sick days taken by students, and conditions that constrain student learning. The proposed budget would provide \$90 million for corrections. While this is a good start, we believe the funding is inadequate. Funding should be appropriated to expand ConnOSHA oversight over school HVAC standards, and additional funds should be identified for remediation and installation of modern HVAC systems (please see our "Indoor Air Quality" proposal in CEA's Legislative Priorities summary at the end of this testimony).

Thank you for your consideration.

Kate Dias
President, CEA

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CEA's 2022 Legislative Priorities

Indoor Air Quality

CEA seeks legislation establishing standards to address poor indoor air quality, inadequate HVAC, and excessive temperatures and humidity in school buildings and providing the financial support to meet those standards.

Building Successful School Communities

CEA seeks legislation:

- Providing social emotional supports and behavioral interventions for students
- Improving the ratios of students to social workers, counselors, special educators, and other certified support staff
- Promoting teacher voice in determining how curricula balance creativity, social and emotional development, and academics
- Improving other conditions of teaching and learning to ensure schools are welcoming for students and staff

Enhancing the Profession of Educator

CEA seeks a comprehensive package of proposals to recruit and retain educators and revitalize the profession by enhancing:

- Equity in teacher preparation programs to promote diversity and to increase the number of promising young adults pursuing careers in education
- Conditions in schools to promote a positive climate for teaching and learning, including uninterrupted teacher-directed time for preparation and collaboration
- Professional growth, leadership, and the elevation of educators' voices in decisions that affect the school community
- Financial incentives to encourage qualified candidates to prepare for a teaching career and serve in the profession in our public schools